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## MINITRAE ET NUMINI EIUS. A CELTIC DEITY AND THE VULGAR LATIN IN AQUINCUM

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**Abstract:** The subject of this paper is a curious and somewhat problematic inscription on an altar from Aquincum. Among the many features of this inscription that are interesting for our study, the most striking one is the beginning of the text: the name of the god or goddess is controversial. Who exactly was Minitra? A Celtic goddess, or someone much better known from Roman religious life? According to Géza Alföldy, the native gods of Pannonia were venerated still in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., including *Teutates*, *Sedatus*, *Ciniaemus* and *Minitra*, etc. Since the inscription in question contains many vulgar Latin phenomena, it becomes questionable whether the name of the deity is written correctly, especially because, while the names of classical gods rarely appear misspelled, the names of the gods of so-called ‘eastern’ cults and mystery religions appear in a number of faulty variations. I will try to identify the deity through the analysis of Vulgar Latin phenomena.

**Keywords:** Minitra, Mithras, Aquincum, Vulgar Latin, native gods

### Minitra from Aquincum

An altar<sup>1</sup> made of limestone (Fig.1.) was found in Budapest, in district 21, Csepel, 157 Gyár street in the house of a gentleman called Balogh<sup>2</sup> at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. After Balogh’s death, his widow moved to district 12, 17 Mozdony street (now Kiss János altábornagy street). She took the altar with her, and she built it into the wall of the new house. In 1906, Bálint Kuzsinszky visited this house and published the inscription together with a picture – the last known

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<sup>1</sup> H: 66, B: 31 cm. CIL III 3474 = CIMRM-2, 1776 = TitAq-1, 226 = CBI 378; Alföldy 1963, 51; Szabó 2001, 62.

<sup>2</sup> CIL III 3474: “*Ofen, Christinenstadt, FABRIKGASSE n. 157. In aedibus Balok.*”

picture of it.<sup>3</sup> After 1908, the altar was treated as missing. At the previous site of the building in Kiss János altábornagy Street, the Budapesti Gazdasági SZC Budai Középiskolája (the Buda High School of the Budapest Vocational Training Centre for Economics) is located today. When the school was built, and when the former building was demolished, it seems the inscription went missing forever.

The altar was erected by a veteran, *Aurelius Florianus*, who served in an unnamed military unit as *beneficiarius consularis*.

The inscription reads:

*Minitrae / Aur(elius) Florian(us) vet(eranus) ex b(ene)f(iciario) co(n)s(ularis) / pro salute{m} / mea{m} et om(n)ium meorum / Numini eius / d(e)dicavi Sabino / II et Venusto co(n)s(ulibus).*

The reading of the inscription is clear. The only question is who the mysterious *Minitra* could have been. In this paper I am trying to identify this deity with the help of the LLDB database which collects Vulgar Latin linguistic phenomena.

Based on consular dating, the altar was erected in 240 A.D. *Aurelius Florianus* had another altar found in Aquincum, which was dedicated to the honour of *Iupiter Optimus Maximus*.<sup>4</sup> The name of the person and the wording of the inscription are both exactly the same as in the *Minitra* inscription. In both cases, the troop to which the *beneficiarius consularis* is attached could have been the *legio II Adiutrix*. Furthermore, epigraphists think another altar is connected to the same person, where the name is *Marcus Aurelius Cocceius Florianus, primuspilus* of the *legio X Gemina*. He dedicated an altar in Vindobona to the honour of *Fortuna Conservatrix*.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Kuzsinszky 1908, 88 Nr. 5.

<sup>4</sup> TitAq-1, 98 = CBI 377: *I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) / Aur(elius) Flor(ianus) b(ene)f(iciarius) / cons(ularis) pro / sal(ute) sua et / suorum / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito)*

<sup>5</sup> CIL III 14359,26 = AEA 2001/02 + 60 = AEA 2005 +36 = AEA 2006 +10 = AEA 2010 +6: *Fortunae / Conservatri(ci) / Cl(audius) M(arcus) Aur(elius) Cocce(ius) Florianus / p(rimus) p(ilus) leg(ionis) X G(eminae) Sev(erianae) / cum suis / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) l(aetus) [m(erito)]*

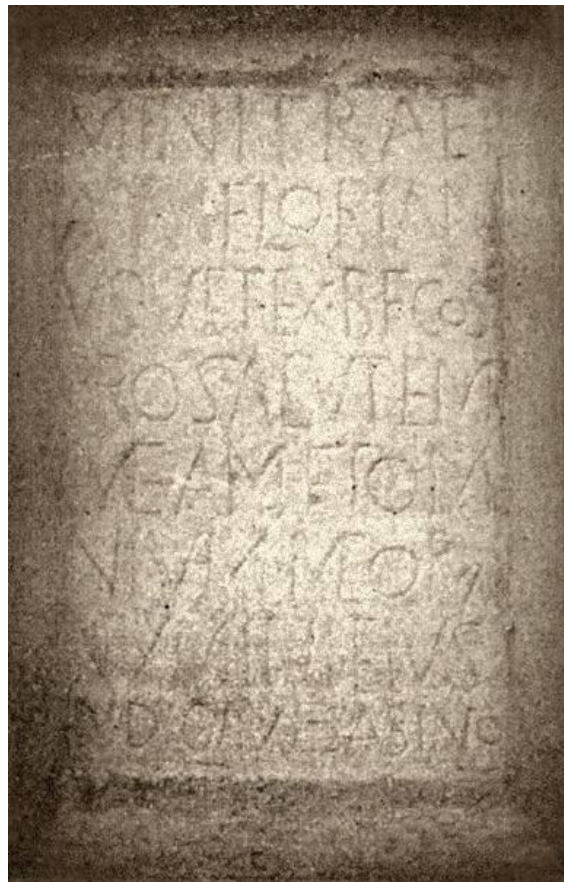


Figure 1. The Minitra altar from Aquincum (photo by Kuzsinszky 1908)

Since the time of the first publication, the text of the Minitra altar has been published several times. Many researchers have studied the name of the deity, some in detail, some only briefly. They proposed various explanations for the name of the mysterious Minitra.<sup>6</sup> According to one group of epigraphists and historians, the name of Minerva is on the inscription, while according to another group, Minitra is a local Celtic or Pannonian goddess who has only this one inscription from the Roman area, and there is also a group who think that the deity can be identified as *Mithras*.

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<sup>6</sup> Theodor Mommsen, who read the inscription first in CIL, indicated with only one *sic* that there was a problem with the god in the dedication.

## Minerva

Bálint Kuzsinszky interpreted *Minitrae* as “Minervae” both times<sup>7</sup> he published the inscription. Minerva appears in the inscriptions of Aquincum mostly in the circle of the members of the Capitoline Triad. Here she had two attributes: *Victrix* and *Augusta*. Minerva’s worship appears on many inscriptions in Aquincum,<sup>8</sup> for example in the *praetorium* sanctuary, the *legati*<sup>9</sup> set an altar to the victorious goddess, or the *collegium armaturarum* set an altar to Mars and Minerva<sup>10</sup> as the science and the spirit of the fight. However, from a linguistic perspective, it is difficult to explain how *Minitrae* would have been created from *Minervae*. In addition, the name of Minerva appears with the conservative spelling in almost all cases throughout the period the cult existed. There are only a few exceptions,<sup>11</sup> especially with a change of the first syllable I/E,<sup>12</sup> but the number of examples is negligible compared to all Minerva dedications.

## The local gods of Pannonia

Some scholars think Minitra is a Celtic or local, Pannonian goddess whose only one known inscription is this one. Minitra is mentioned as a Celtic or local goddess each time by citing Géza Alföldy’s 1963 article.<sup>13</sup> Aside from the ‘*unidentified local goddess*’ attribute, there is no explanation whatsoever as to why Alföldy considered Minitra a Pannonian or Celtic goddess. Only the name of the deity is known, and it could be of Celtic origin.<sup>14</sup> There are only a handful of local deities that are characteristic only of Pannonia and do not appear in other

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<sup>7</sup> Kuzsinszky 1899, 144–145, Nr. 132 and Kuzsinszky 1908, 88 Nr. 5.

<sup>8</sup> Zsidi 1993, 185–209.

<sup>9</sup> *legati*: *Lucius Septimius Flaccus* (AE 1974, 512 = TitAq-1, 195), *Caius Valerius Pudens* (CIL III 10438 = ILS 3131 = TitAq-1, 225) and *Caius Valerius Sabinianus* (AE 1962, 119 = TitAq-1, 189).

<sup>10</sup> CIL III 10435 = ILS 2363 = TitAq-1, 214: *Marti et Minerv(ae) // Aug(ustis) coll(egium) / armatura(rum) / leg(ionis) II Adi(utricis) / P(iae) F(idelis) / Antoninia/nae*

<sup>11</sup> LLDB-24431: MINNERV;

<sup>12</sup> LLDB-15135: MENERVAE; LLDB-5752: ME[NERV]; LLDB-44998: MEN; LLDB-74685: MENERVA; CIL II 1950: MENERV; AE 2004, 451: MENER[VAE]; CIL XI 3081 = CIL I 365 = ILS 3124 = ILLRP 238 = ZPE-140-252 = AE 1998, 506: MENERVA;

<sup>13</sup> Alföldy 1963, 47–69. 51. “*The Roman form of worship, namely the votum, which entailed erecting everlasting stones, and the veneration of the Roman gods themselves, barely spread among the masses of indigenous population. Their native gods including Teutates, Sedatus, Ciniaemus and Minitra, etc., were still venerated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., even if not in an unchanged form. In an inscription from 240 A.D., the otherwise unknown local goddess Minitra is listed.*” (Translation by me.)

<sup>14</sup> Meid 2005.

provinces. The number of gods named in the language of the natives is small and all of them occur only on one or two altars. There are only two cults which came into being in Pannonia or got a specific feature here: the *Nutrices* of Poetovio<sup>15</sup> and *Silvanus*.<sup>16</sup>

At the same time, in the territory of Pannonia the names of the Celtic gods are not unknown from inscriptions. Celtic deity names are often added as epithets to the names of the Roman gods invoked, like in the case of the *Genius Ciniaemus*<sup>17</sup> and *Silvanus Magla*.<sup>18</sup> While archaeological evidence suggests that many Celtic deities were venerated under Roman names (*Diana*, *Silvanus*, *Hercules*, just to mention a few), the healing deities *Aesculapius* and *Hygeia*<sup>19</sup> were most probably hiding behind the Celtic names of *Vidasus* and *Thana*.<sup>20</sup> Apart from their names, we do not know anything about these deities.

According to archaeological research, the area of Aquincum was a mixing point for several populations: the former Illyrian-Pannonian population lived together with immigrant *Eravisci* and with the Celtic tribes re-settled here by the Romans, originating in south-western Pannonia.<sup>21</sup> One surely local-born god is *Teutanus*. After the Roman occupation, the *Eraviscus* deity was identified with the main god of the Roman religion, since their most characteristic features and powers were very similar. The Celtic deity, *Teutanus* was venerated as *Iupiter Optimus Maximus Teutanus*<sup>22</sup> and he was also represented in the similarity of the highest Roman deity. The cult complex of the god was in Gellért hill and had connections not only with Aquincum, but also with Carnuntum, where sacrifices were made on the Pfaffenberg in a temple district for the *Iupiter Optimus Maximus K(arnuntinus?)*.<sup>23</sup> There is a chance these two gods were in fact the same

<sup>15</sup> It is a special form of the cult of nurse- and mother goddesses limited to Poetovio, see Kos 2016.

<sup>16</sup> *Silvanus* was the most popular indigenous deity in south Pannonia and in other southern Illyrian regions. For more on the cult of *Silvanus*, see Dorcey 1992.

<sup>17</sup> CIL III 3617 = RIU-S, 246 = TitAq-2, 941 = CBI 420. A Celtic god of protection of merchants, *Genius Ciniaemus* (maybe instead of *Cimiacinus*, cf. CIL III 5773), is named on the altar of a beneficiarius along with *Iuno* and *Genius commercii*. Kovács 2005, Nr. 246.

<sup>18</sup> CIL III 3963 = ILS 3576 = AIJ 548; Epithets belong to the category which give *Silvanus* specifically, culturally defined, as the *erbarius*, *bellator*, or forms created by the *interpretatio Romana*: *Mammula* or *Magla*.

<sup>19</sup> Plemić 2012, 49.

<sup>20</sup> CIL III 10819 = CIL III 14354,23 = ILS 3910 = AIJ 518 = AE 1901, 216. These two were undoubtedly domestic, Pannonian-Illyrian deities who preserved their original names under the Romanisation. These names refer to the initial stage of the process of involving local cults in Roman religious content and the provincial pantheon. For Illyrian deities, see Mayer 1948–51, 235–43.

<sup>21</sup> Topál 1995, 538.

<sup>22</sup> Póczy 1999, 201–223. Hampel 1892, 31–73.

<sup>23</sup> Piso 2003 and Jobst 1977, 155–164. The solving of the letter “K” as *Karnuntinus* is not convincing, further finds might bring us closer to the solution.

Celtic god venerated in the capitals of the two Pannonias. On an inscription in the territory of the *Eravisci*, the name of the fertility cult of *Suleviae*,<sup>24</sup> the Celtic form of the *Matres* also appears.

### The cult of Mithras in Aquincum

Each of the great Mithras corpora compiled at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century mentions the Minitra altar as a Mithras monument. The first of these was the work of Franz Cumont,<sup>25</sup> where the inscription is presented without comment. This description was taken over by Marten Joseph Vermaseren<sup>26</sup> in his monumental collection in the 1960s, again leaving the *Minitrae* engraved in the first line without commentary. In 1992, Manfred Clauss<sup>27</sup> also published the inscription, and he already noted that Minitra must *surely* mean Mithras. In the *Vulgarlateinische Inschriften*, E. Diehl<sup>28</sup> noted that *Minitrae* is a form of *Mithrae*.<sup>29</sup>

The cult of the invincible god of light Mithras spread over Pannonia during the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. It was one of the most popular cults in the territory of Aquincum. According to our current knowledge, there were several Mithras shrines (*mithraea*) in use in different parts of Aquincum at the same time.<sup>30</sup> There are seventeen inscriptions of Mithras, at least six reliefs, and eleven more reliefs of Cautes and Cautopates, his two companions, found in various parts of Aquincum. Mithraic communities consisted of generally 20–50 people, who were in close contact with each other. Larger communities cannot be inferred from the size of the shrines, because cult events took place within, in the presence of all believers. Commitment to the community was most likely kept secret. This may be the reason why the sanctuaries were either attached to private houses within the city, or stood in walled enclosures on out-of-town properties, hidden from the eyes of outsiders.

In the sixteen inscriptions of Mithras found in Aquincum, the name of the god appears in various forms. There is only one occasion where *Mithrae* was fully and correctly engraved in the inscription. In most cases, it was abbreviated in the

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<sup>24</sup> AE 1937, 212. There are over forty votive inscriptions erected in their honour known across an area stretching from Great Britain to Pannonia.

<sup>25</sup> Cumont 1899, Nr. 326.

<sup>26</sup> *CIMRM* 1776.

<sup>27</sup> Clauss 1992, Footnote 9.

<sup>28</sup> Diehl, 1910, 15. Nr. 132.

<sup>29</sup> Others also mentioned this inscription referring to Mithras; Patsch 1900, 93: “*des Namens des Mithras durch den Steinmetz nicht, man findet auch Methrae, Mythirae, Minitrae, Mitrae, Mythrae, Mitthrae, Mitrhe u. s. w.*”

<sup>30</sup> Zsidi 2011, 20–31.

usual form: M(ithrae). There were three instances of the full but faulty form: *Mit(h)rae*,<sup>31</sup> *Mythrae*,<sup>32</sup> and *Mitrhae*,<sup>33</sup> two of them from the *mithraeum* of the *tribuni laticlavii*.

### *Numini Mithrae*

The *numini eius* formula is also a tell-tale one. In the imperial cult, altars were usually dedicated to a god or to the emperors' *numen*, referring to the divine power.<sup>34</sup> Upon closer examination, the formula is often associated with Mithras,<sup>35</sup> where the word *numen* is an equivalent to divine power of *deus*. It is also known from the *mithraeum* of Santa Prisca,<sup>36</sup> or closer to Aquincum, from the Poetovian *mithraeum* (Pannonia).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> CIL III 3480 = CIMRM-2, 1774 = TitAq-1, 260; AE 1910, 127 = CIMRM-2, 01781 = TitAq-1, 261 and RIU-6, 1355 = EpPann-3, p 26 = AE 2004, +1133.

<sup>32</sup> CIL III 3481 = ILS 4260 = CIMRM-2, 1790 = TitAq-1, 256 = GeA 349.

<sup>33</sup> AE 1990, 818 = TitAq-11, 252.

<sup>34</sup> 356–367 and Fishwick 1970, 191–197.

<sup>35</sup> There are many examples of this use in epigraphical texts. AE 1991, 1301 (Pannonia superior, Poetovio); CIL III 968 = CIL III 7729 = CIL III 7730 = ILS 4241 = FMFS 252 = IDR III/2, 306 = CIMRM-2, 2007 = CIMRM-2, 2010 = Sicoe-2014, 188 = Sicoe-2014, 189 (Dacia, Acidava); CIL III 1549 = IDR III/1, 145 = CIMRM-2, 2153 = CERom-3, 225b = AE 1983, 799b = AE 2008, +1157 = Sicoe-2014, 203 (Dacia, Tibiscum); CIL V 8997 = Pais 892 = EaNovara 26 = CIMRM-1, 704 = MLNovara p 131 (Transpadana, Novaria); CIL VI 724 = ILS 4204 = CIMRM-1, 526 (Rome); CIL VI 747 = CIMRM-1, 553 (Rome); CIL XI 5736 = ILS 4207 = CIMRM-1, 687 = CIMRM-2, p 33 = AE 2006, +243 (Umbria, Sentinum); CIL XIV 3567 = EE-09, p 469 = InscrIt-4-1, 67 = ILS 4237 = CIMRM-1, 214 = Louvre 30 (Samnium, Tibur); AE 1965, 32 = IDR-3-4, 46 = IDR-3-5-1, 56 = CIGDac 15 (Dacia Apulum); AE 1940, 81 = ISDoli 15 = CIMRM-1, 470 = CCID 370 (Rome); CIMRM-1, 754 = InscrIt-10-2, 216 (Venetia, Parentium).

<sup>36</sup> CIMRM-1, 497 = SPrisca p 340e = AE 1941, 78 = AE 1946, +82: *Deo Soli Invicto Mithr(a)e / quod saepe Numini eius / ex audito gratias e[st] vota / [reddere moniti sunt]*.

<sup>37</sup> AE 1991, 1301: *D(eo) S(oli) I(nvicto) M(ithrae) / Num(ini) Sanct(o) / et Praest(antissimo) / L() Vander() / v(otum) s(olvit) l(ibens) m(erito) / [...] Kal(endas) Novem(bres) / Severo et Quint(iano) / p(atre?) p(rosedente?) SII[...]*

## The religion of *beneficarii consulares* in Pannonia

From the beginning of the early second century began to create administration centres, *beneficiarius stationes* along the major roads of the provinces. Most of the *beneficiarius* stations were along the Amber road and on the road in the southern part of Pannonia where they could monitor routes of communication. There were different functions of *beneficarii* depending on who served in Pannonia: *beneficarii consularis*, *beneficarii laticlavi*, *beneficarii legati legionis*, *beneficarii praefecti*, *beneficarii procuratoris*. The earliest inscription dedicated by a *beneficiarius* in Pannonia was an altar found at Mursa from 164.<sup>38</sup> The largest number of inscriptions were dedicated by the Pannonian *beneficarii consulares* to the leading Roman god Jupiter (Figure 2.) and carried the formula “the best and the greatest” (*Iupiter Optimus Maximus*). *Beneficarii consularis* seem to have been more eclectic in their choice of divinities than the others like *beneficarii procurators*, although both groups were mostly erecting altars to Jupiter. A little more than 70% of the votive monuments placed in Pannonia by *beneficarii consulares* appeal to Jupiter Optimus Maximus. In Sirmium more than eighty altars along with twelve bronze and stone statues of Jupiter were discovered<sup>39</sup> in one of the official sanctuaries all dedicated by *beneficarii consulares*. He was worshipped alone or together with other deities, mostly with *Genii* or with all gods (*I.O.M. et ceterisque diis deabusque*). If we add to this percentage the inscriptions in which the supreme divinity is associated with Iuno, Ceres or the other gods, or invoked with *Genii*, we reach the 89%. The results are much higher to those obtained for the whole empire or the neighboring Dacia where the ratio is 60%.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> AE 1973, 448 = CBI 413.

<sup>39</sup> Jeremic et al. 1992.

<sup>40</sup> Popescu 2004, 283.



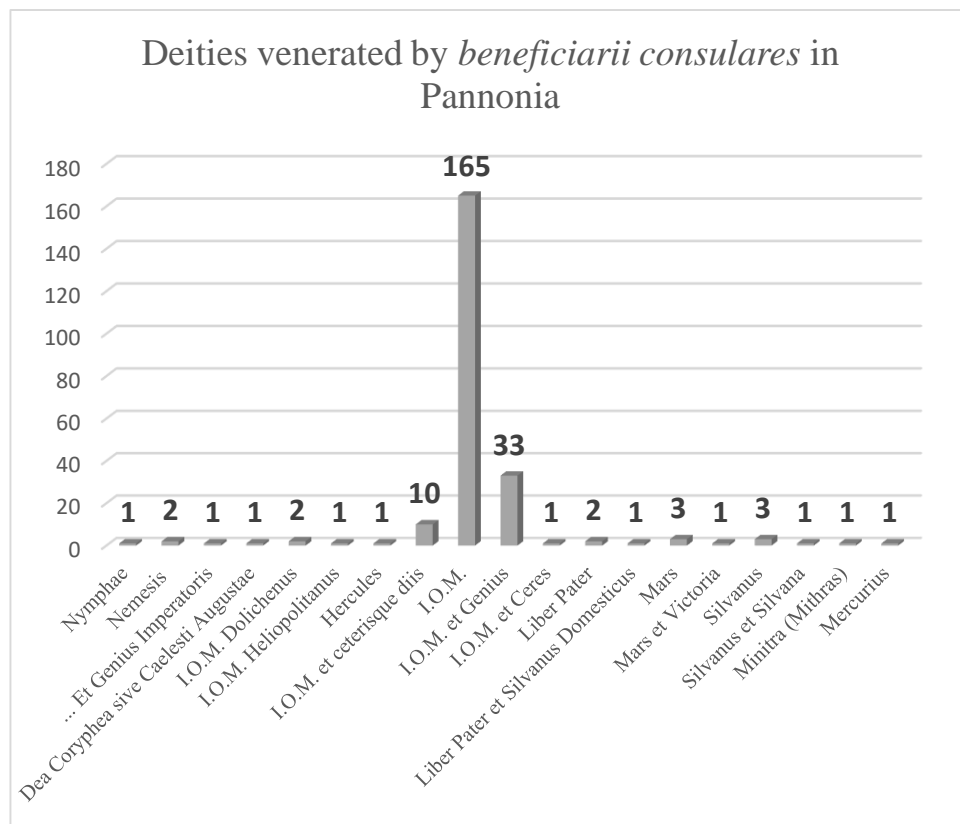


Figure 2. Dedication by the Pannonian beneficiarii to the Gods and goddesses

### How could the MINITRA form have been created?

In order to understand MINITRA more clearly, and to take a stand regarding its interpretation, we have to examine the wording of the altar. Looking closely at the only photo we have, and which is of bad quality, it seems that the first two letters is ME, so the reading should in fact be *Menitrae*. (Fig.3.) The engraver of the inscription did start the first syllable badly and this could have caused other problems in the name of the deity.

1	MENITRAE
2	AVR FLORIAN
3	VS VET EX BF COS
4	PRO SALVTEM
5	MEAM ET OM
6	NIVM MEORVM
7	NVMINI EIVS
8	DIDICAVI SABINO
9	II ET VENVSTO COS

Figure 3 Reading of the inscription

If we accept the reading as *Menitrae*, the first error is dittography. This is a duplication of the first syllable that came about because the copier mistakenly wrote two letters (or, in our case, two syllables) instead of one during copying. This type of error occurs very often in Latin inscriptions, and it appears in Aquincum too.

Besides the aforementioned E/I change, the M is also replaced with an N. This phenomenon is attested in several inscriptions from the territory of Roman Pannonia. It can always be attributed to an error on the part of the carver or the composer of the text. However, there might be another explanation for the presence of the N, also specific to Pannonia. The carver or composer might have inserted an intervocalic N into the word *Methrae*. In the corpus of inscriptions of Aquincum, there is another inscription that shows the same Vulgar Latin phenomenon.<sup>41</sup> In the funerary inscription of *Gnaeus Pompeius Felix*,<sup>42</sup> the birthplace of the man was indicated as *Ionudrom*. Identifying this place is very difficult. According to Lassányi, the first two letters stand for a DIO prefix, and there is an inserted N, so the place could be Diodurum, which is in Gallia (Jouars-Pontchartain), or Divodurum Mediomatricorum (Metz). However, it must be noted that this is just one example, and at the current stage of data procession for Pannonia, there are not enough examples to deem this insertion a Pannonian feature.

The vowel I was converted into E in a considerable number of the Latin inscriptions. Confusion of the short I and the long E occurred in the name of the god Mithras too.<sup>43</sup> The mix-up of I and E appears on other Mithraic inscriptions as well, for example in a cult relief from Dalmatia, in the form of *Meterae*,<sup>44</sup> or on another inscription from Dalmatia, in the form of *Meter[ae]*,<sup>45</sup> and on a lost

<sup>41</sup> I am grateful to Andrea Barta for valuable information about this inscription.

<sup>42</sup> Lassányi 2018, 95–97.

<sup>43</sup> Adamik 2018.

<sup>44</sup> LLDB-221; CIMRM-2, 1892 = AEHercegovine 28 = ILJug-1, 112 = AE 1906, 184.

<sup>45</sup> LLDB-28122; CIL III 14617 = CIMRM-2, 1896 = AEHercegovine 9. It is worth pointing

inscription from Rome, in the form of *Methrae*.<sup>46</sup> By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., the fusion of E/I is the determining process of vowel changes in Aquincum – which corresponds to the Vulgar Latin tendency in the whole Empire.

The Th/T contamination is a quasi-orthographical error. When Greek words were borrowed to the Latin language, sometimes the aspirated consonants TH, PH and CH, were converted into the non-aspirated T, P, and C. The highest number of such changes may in fact be seen in personal names, which were the most frequent Greek words in inscriptions. In this case, the sound in Mithras also underwent a change from an aspirated to a non-aspirated consonant. This orthographic inaccuracy had been so long-established and widespread that it does not provide specific data regarding the use of Latin in the territory of Aquincum.<sup>47</sup>

Apart from these problems, the text of the altar has additional Vulgar Latin language features. The line before the last has *didicavi* instead of *dedicavi*.<sup>48</sup> In the epigraphic material of Pannonia, there is a great number of examples for the fluctuation of preverbs. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the confusion of *de-* and *di-* became widespread not only in Pannonia, but also all over the Empire.

Another Vulgar Latin feature of the text of the inscription is *pro salutem meam*.<sup>49</sup> *Pro* is supposed to be followed by a noun in the ablative, and beside the many ablative forms after *pro*, there are only three occurrences of the accusative in Pannonia in addition to this inscription. These can all be dated to the same era, to the time of the *Severi* or so. Regarding the prepositions *in*, *cum*, *ob* and *pro*, we can observe that the ablative and the accusative can sometimes replace each other. The hypercorrect expression *pro salutem suam* instead of *pro salute sua* features in four inscriptions from Pannonia. Moreover, there are at least 30 other inscriptions discovered in other Roman provinces where the formula is used with the accusative.<sup>50</sup>

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out the specific phenomenon in the name of Mithras, how the I is converted into an E, and how an additional, superfluous E appears between the consonants T and R (*epenthesis*).

<sup>46</sup> LLDB-37068; CIL VI 511 = CLE 1529 = CCCA-3, 243 = CIMRM-1, 522 = CMRDM-2, p 177 = CMRDM-3, p 119 = Dubosson-2018, 104.

<sup>47</sup> Gonda 2017.

<sup>48</sup> LLDB-14902.

<sup>49</sup> LLDB-14901.

<sup>50</sup> Beu-Dachin 2014.

Based on the enormous work of Vermaseren on Mithraic artefacts, the writing of Mithras's name does not appear uniformly on inscriptions. We know more than 520 inscriptions from the Roman Empire that invoke Mithras, and the name is in most cases abbreviated in the form *D(eo) S(oli) I(nvicto) M(ithrae)*. When spelled out, the name often contains features of Vulgar Latin, and it appears in a dozen different versions in Latin inscriptions (*Mithrae*, *Methrae*, *Mitre*, *Mitrai*, *Minitrae*, *Mitrae*, *Mythrae*, *Metras*, *Midre*, *Mytrae*, *Mythrae*).

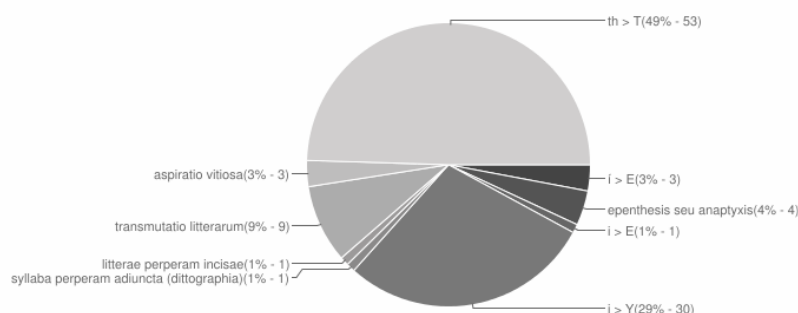


Figure 4 Vulgar Latin phenomena in the name of Mithras in the LLDB database

Based on data from the LLDB database, it can be seen that most changes to the name of Mithras concern the previously mentioned Th/T change, that is to say, the simplification of difficult consonants in the spoken language. A separate group is made up of mistakes that are not linguistic, but are written-technical errors such as letter change, badly incised letters, or dittography. Concerning vowel errors (vocalism), a relatively large number of mistakes appeared in the first syllable, especially in the form of fluctuation between I and Y. The hypercorrect use of Y instead of I in the name of Mithras<sup>51</sup> is found only in one of the inscriptions from Pannonia. The name is taken over from the Greek language, from the form Μιθράς, which in Latin would be transliterated as Mithras, inflected in the first declension. The Greek origin might explain the hypercorrect use of Y. Epenthesis, or vowel insertion (in our case, E or I) appeared only in a

<sup>51</sup> In the LLDB database, there are thirty examples for this vocalic change, which may be due to Greek influence (LLDB-19641; LLDB-19514; LLDB-15510; LLDB-538; LLDB-16552; LLDB-15185; LLDB-9160; LLDB-5923; LLDB-5922; LLDB-5921; LLDB-5918; LLDB-70116; LLDB-70112; LLDB-65675; LLDB-65598; LLDB-65593; LLDB-50185; LLDB-37008; LLDB-36811; LLDB-28139; LLDB-28138; LLDB-28134; LLDB-28131; LLDB-28118; LLDB-28112; LLDB-28060; LLDB-28051; LLDB-27154; LLDB-27155; LLDB-26996).

handful of cases, between the TH and the R.<sup>52</sup> Writing a (long, unstressed) *i* as an E most probably correlated with the insertion of the extra vowel.<sup>53</sup>

It is a complex issue to answer whether these phenomena developed in Pannonia and reflect the everyday language use of the local population or they were common all over the Empire. However, the outlined processes (dittography, the fluctuation between I/E and TH/T) are all in proportion to the percentage of confusions found in other words in the given area.

## Conclusion

In contrast to the other cults, we are in a very difficult situation regarding the cult of Mithras from a sociolinguistic point of view, since we know almost nothing about its history and its teachings. Only archaeological findings and inscriptions of the cult members can provide a point of reference for the social and linguistic background of the believers. The most authentic information about the social status, the cultural background and the origin of the people who dedicated these altars are often provided by the linguistic characteristics. Scribes seem to be influenced by the spoken language, and the mistakes found on Mithraic inscriptions reflect the poor education of the believers. Unlike official cults, new religious cults that appeared in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> century often show more vulgarism in the dedications, which reflects the spoken language.<sup>54</sup> Writing the names of gods in such a vulgar form suggests a less strict relationship between devout and god than was possible earlier in Roman religion, where adhering to formalities was essential. We cannot exclude with absolute certainty that the worship of a local Celtic or pre-Celtic deity, “Minitra” (or “Menitra”) was revived in 3<sup>rd</sup> century Aquincum. Nevertheless, the arguments outlined above – dedication to the god’s *numen* (*numini eius*), the many Vulgar Latin linguistic phenomena (*didicavi*, *pro salutem meam*), and the fact that all changes that could create *Menitrae* from *Mithrae* are present in other inscriptions of Mithras in Aquincum – all suggest that this is just another one of the many name variations of Mithras.

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<sup>52</sup> The epenthesis of I in the form of *Mythirae* (LLDB-5902; IDR III/5 272 = CIL III 1112 = CIMRM-2, 1945 = Sicoe-2014, 26; Apulum).

<sup>53</sup> Each time associated with the inserted vowel between TH and R. Because of the epenthesis, the short I stretched to long I.

<sup>54</sup> Mithras isn’t the only one, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century more and more vulgar phenomena appeared in the dedications. For instances Jupiter Dolichenus had his name in several time as *Dulcenus* and this form is not at all unique in Pannonia: it was how the engraver used their own “regular” spelling to reflect the current pronunciation. See Tünde Vágási: The sociolinguistic research of the cult Jupiter Dolichenus, 2020 (forthcoming).

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